


14

BISHOP EASTBURN'S SERMON

BEFORE THE DIRECTORS OF

THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE
PROMOTION OF EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE.



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THE MODERATION OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL
CHURCH:

THE

SECOND ANNUAL SERMON

BEFORE THE DIRECTORS OF

THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION
OF EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE,

DELIVERED IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, OCT. 31, 1849;

AND AGAIN IN ST. PAUL'S, BOSTON,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, NOV. 18, 1849,

BEFORE THE MASSACHUSETTS AUXILIARY OF THE SAME SOCIETY.

BY THE

RIGHT REV. MANTON EASTBURN, D.D.,

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

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S E R M O N.

ST. JUDE, VERSE 3.

THAT YE SHOULD EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE
DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS.

AMONG those truths which are most distinctly to be traced upon the sacred page, is that of the militant character of believers during their progress to a better country. Radiant as is the Scripture with promises, even to the life that now is, not one of those promises says any thing about repose. The word of God engages to give us inward joy, but not exemption from action. It tells us of sympathizing friends, — not only among “the household of faith” below, but among that “cloud of witnesses” who have passed into glory: but, at the same time, it never allows us to forget, that this very assurance is only intended as an encouragement to enable us to contend more manfully with enemies. It presents to us foes besetting us within: it points to the powers of darkness without: it holds forth, in the light of a laborious trust committed to the Christian soldier, the work of carrying onward, in the midst of unbelief and error, that truth of God,

which is at length to assert its dominion by complete and universal victory.

And yet, my brethren, this is a condition of our membership in the great army of the Captain of salvation, which we are frequently found to contemplate with reluctance. The gospel which we have received is committed to us, not merely for our own welfare, but that, in our hands, it may become diffusive; and, in order to its being thus diffusive, it must be constantly aggressive upon the territories of this evil world. But the tendency of our indolent nature is to decline this service, and to sink into the downy lap of a tempting, but forbidden peace. As we look out upon the millions around us, either arrayed in systematic hostility against Christ, or lying in the slumber of profound indifference to his redemption, or deceiving themselves and others by corruptions of the doctrines of his word, we shrink from the conflict. We would fain escape from it; we even endeavor to persuade ourselves that escape is a duty; and, our attempt being but too successful, it soon comes to appear to us not as being a selfish, but a sanctified desire, to sigh for the wings of the dove, that, fleeing to some nook of rest, we may enjoy the sequestered luxury of communion with God and with ourselves. In the mean time, however, the articles of our enlistment are before us, and cannot be evaded. And, unless one of the chiefest of these articles be fulfilled by each of us, in an earnest and unwearied activity, what, it may well be asked, is to be our hope for the world? What is to be the result, for example, if the ministry, — that

divinely commissioned host, — shall begin to exhibit symptoms of exhausted patience, and of a desire to exchange service in the field for inglorious ease, or lettered seclusion? What shall we not have to dread, when the active laity who are helpers to the ministry shall grow cold and spiritless; when there shall be none to cast of their substance into the treasury of missions; when the poor shall become tired of giving from their poverty, and the rich of pouring their consecrated wealth into the channels of Christian beneficence; when there shall be no youthful bands, with elastic physical powers, and hearts of fire, to labor within the blessed enclosures of our Sunday Schools; when there shall be no organized associations of the people of God, acting as voluntary handmaidens to the Church of God, in the great work of increasing that spiritual knowledge which is life eternal, and diminishing that spiritual ignorance of which the end is everlasting death? When we have imagined to ourselves such a condition of things as this, we have, at the same moment, drawn the picture of a period, when Satan's power, being unresisted by human instrumentality rendered mighty by the Spirit of God, will march in triumph over the ruins of a race which it is the Almighty's gracious purpose to redeem. The redemption itself has been, indeed, completed: but the publication of it is laid upon us men; whatever the difficulties, therefore, which this work brings, and however sickening the view of those evils against which our efforts are directed, in this battle we must "earnestly contend," — until that hour sung by the

harp of prophecy shall come, when “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,” and when “every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

It was under the prompting, as we may humbly trust, of such views of Christian duty, that the Association was formed whose anniversary has now brought us together. Our ostensible vocation is that of active laborers, united in the bounden and privileged service of extending, through the agency of this Society, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” We aim at the dissemination of scriptural truth among the people; and of scriptural truth, moreover, as set forth in the standards of that portion of the Universal Church in which we are now living, and within which we are hoping, when our work is finished, at last to die.

The views of the Protestant Episcopal Church, then, being those which we are laboring to diffuse, it will be justly expected of us that, in all which issues from our press, *we should correctly represent that Church*. How shall this be done? I propose to consider this inquiry in a single aspect only; and to show that we shall be faithful exponents of the teachings of our Communion, so far as we adhere steadfastly to that MODERATION by which, among other illustrious features, she is so pre-eminently distinguished.

Let us, then, look at this character of our Church, in the first place, *in reference to the method in which it deals with the subject of Episcopal Ordination*.

I take my stand, Christian brethren, upon the good

old Preface to the Ordinal: a document which is one of the glories of our Sion; and which, the oftener it is read, not only by our Clergy, but by the body of our members, ought the more thoroughly to engrave upon their minds the conviction, that all attempts, based upon the language of the Prayer Book, to force our Church into an attitude of exclusiveness, are utterly impracticable and vain. In this brief statement, the great Reformers of England simply assert two things: first, that the Bible, and the voice of primitive antiquity, agree in recognizing three orders in the Christian ministry; and secondly, that, this being the fact, no man can lawfully serve at the altars *of our particular fold*, unless he has received at Episcopal hands his sacred commission.

Here, then, is an authoritative standard, worthy of our gratitude to God for the spirit from on high by which its phraseology was so obviously dictated. It merely claims to say, with every other Christian body, what is that constitution of the ministry which, among ourselves, is deemed to be after the scriptural and apostolical pattern. It fulminates no ban of excommunication against that uncounted host of laborers, who, within other pales, are dispensing to famishing millions the bread of life, and moistening their parched lips with water from the wells of salvation. It is a summary of our belief on this single topic, which deserves to be inscribed in letters of gold; and which, like every other remnant of the thoughts of those noble men, bears the visible impress of a soul, true, indeed, to the duty of asserting its own convictions,

but large enough to comprehend within its ample embrace all who, in every place, set forth “the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

Now it is of course not intended to deny, that, from this general declaration of the scriptural origin of Episcopacy, a wide range of inferences is allowable to individual minds. Such a liberty has, accordingly, been freely taken, and it is as freely conceded. But the point which I would urge upon your candid attention is this, — that for these inferences they who, in the exercise of a legitimate Christian freedom, choose to maintain them, are alone responsible. Our Church claims it as a *right*, that, in all professed representations of her views of ecclesiastical polity, whether by persons speaking singly, or by organized associations of men, her standards should not be wrested into the expression of what those standards do not say; and herself thus displaced, after all the precautions which she has taken, from that position of holy charity, which makes her so justly a name and a praise among the churches of Christendom. I hail, therefore, as one among the many blessings to flow from our labors, that of placing the Episcopal Church, so often misrepresented by her friends as well as by her opponents, in her true attitude before the world. Let the pages which bear our superscription be a reflection of the tempered spirit, so distinctly breathing in the opening to the Ordination Offices. Let the Tracts which we scatter over the land, — and the productions which we lay upon the shelves of our parochial libraries, — and the volumes, tiny in size, but incalculably

mighty withal in their results, with which we inform the rising thousands in our Sunday Schools, — be instinct with the same “meekness of wisdom.” Let there be no lines of circumvallation established, which the Prayer Book has not drawn; and within which alone we are to look for the kingdom of Christ, not in its perfectness only, but in the very essentials of its being, — while on the outside is a mixed multitude, to which we are at liberty to attach every name but that of churches of the living God. If any man will speak where our formularies have not spoken, let him speak: but let not the silence of the one be made answerable for the interpretations put upon that silence by the other. More than this we do not ask: as much as this, simple justice demands.

At the point at which we have now arrived, it will not surely be deemed irrelevant, my friends and brethren, to ask the question, — Since we are not constrained, by any inevitable necessity imposed by the teachings of the Church to which we belong, to utter a positive denial of any authority for other ministrations, is it desirable, that we should enter upon the service of thus distorting her language before the world? If Scripture has, in any part of its inspired, and therefore infallible revelations, shut out other ministries from all claim to fraternal recognition, — or if our own standards of appeal, drawing conclusions from the tenor of Holy Writ, have pronounced the same definitive judgment, — we are bound in consistency, whatever may be the consequences to ensue, to proclaim this sentence of exclusion to the ends of

the earth. But, in the absence of any such statements in the Book of Common Prayer, is it to be desired, — I will ask once more, — that any among us should present our Communion in thus revolting an aspect to mankind? Is this the probable path to that consummation for which we all devoutly pray, her wide and rapidly extended dominion over the minds and hearts of men? Are these extravagant claims an auspicious harbinger, to prepare the way before her, and to make straight, in valleys hitherto untrodden by her blessed footsteps, an highway for her entrance? This is an inquiry which does not fall properly under the charge of a mere temporizing expediency. Where the written instructions by which we are bound prescribe one definite path, we are not permitted, for any seeming advantage, to pursue another: but where, as in the present instance, no such compulsion is laid upon us, regard to consequences assumes an aspect of true wisdom; and not to regard them may be only, in other words, to rush upon gratuitous martyrdom of opportunities which a gracious Providence has opened. Without any violation, therefore, of Christian integrity, we may remonstrate, and we will remonstrate, against the superfluous hindrance cast in our pathway by that departure from the temperate complexion of our standards, which distinguishes such numerous exponents of their language. That, in spite of this obstacle, we have advanced, and are still advancing, makes nothing against my argument. This only proves the capabilities for extension with which God has endowed us; and should rather lead us the more

clearly to perceive all that we might have achieved, and to lament the more deeply that unauthorized interpretation of the declarations of our Church, whereby, with an impediment of our own devising, we have retarded her natural movement towards the captivity of human affections. My brethren, what is there, in the constitution, polity, and offices of a Church, fitted to make it prosperous, glorious, and blest of God, which ours has not? Its ministry is conformed precisely to the scriptural model; its institutions are, above all others, conservative bulwarks of order and of law; its care for the young, manifested in its system of catechetical instruction, and in its adherence to the primitive ordinance of Confirmation, invites the parents of our land to enter within its fold for the sake of the blessings which will flow to their offspring; its Articles, studiously avoiding metaphysical subtleties, are a clear and full embodiment of the gospel of redemption; its Liturgy is radiant with Christ, in all his precious offices for the salvation of the world; by its formularies, moreover, it not only *teaches* the essential principles of the oracles of God, but *preserves them likewise from mutilation* during the changes of successive centuries; while, to commend it still farther to the hearts of men, they who framed its services were the very men, who, in brotherly union with Continental champions of the Bible, stood forth, even amidst the fire, in a common phalanx of resistance against papal error, and defence of Protestant truth. What, then, does such a Church as this need? Nothing but that enlarged spirit, on the part of us

who profess to disseminate her doctrines, of which herself has set us the example; and which, instead of casting out, addresses with a salutation of grace, mercy, and peace, that mighty number, who, marked by whatever name, and dwelling beneath whatever sky, “love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”

But there is still another view, brethren in Christ, in which the exhibition of our Church in this excluding aspect may well be deprecated; and to which, before passing to other topics, I beg permission for a moment to advert. If such a course is adverse to the growth of our portion of the Lord’s vineyard, is it not equally fatal to the life of our own inward affections? This is a consideration which deserves to be pondered by every man, who, while he is laboring for the extension of the gospel, rightly estimates the importance of nourishing the flame of his own love for the gospel. If, while engaged in the work of diffusing sacred knowledge, we are conducting it on principles which allow us to see, in the various divisions of the great army of ministering servants of Christ, only one vast multitude of impostors, arrogating powers which they have not, and executing functions among churches which have nothing more than a name even to be, — what must be the reflex influence which such labors will exert upon ourselves? On this subject we may presume to judge no man. It is no less our duty, however, to look into the natural tendencies of systems; and to pause before we commit ourselves to a theory, which is perilous to the life of God in the soul: which places the regularity of the external

commission higher than those unsearchable riches of Christ, which are the subject of the commission: and which thus transfers our attachment, by an insidious process, from the treasure to the vessel. And will it be said that caution such as this, if ever necessary, is not rendered doubly proper by the wide-spread infatuation of these times, — when men are allowing their morbid sympathies to run forth freely towards a fold, “in the which the pure word of God is” *not* “preached;” “in the which the Sacraments be” *not* “duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same;” but in which there *is* an apostolically constituted ministry for the purpose of conveying both word and sacraments; — while these very sympathies are wholly averted from those organized Christian bodies, where, though they be not, indeed, constructed after the pattern which we are constrained to adopt, and which we rejoice to follow, yet the redemption of a triune God is regularly proclaimed, — where the ordinances of Christ’s appointment are regularly dispensed, — and upon the labors of whose pastors the Holy Spirit is seen descending, from year to year, with the abundant and unquestionable tokens of His presence and His power?

Let us now survey this moderation of our Church, in the second place, *with reference to the views which it presents of the nature of the ministerial office.*

I turn, for the illustration of these views, to the Office for the Ordination of Priests: and nothing more is necessary for my purpose. If it has been

deemed wise counsel to recommend to our Clergy the periodical reading of this Form, with the object of awakening them afresh to the sense of their duties and responsibilities, the advice might come with equal propriety in view of another effect of its perusal; that of keeping before them, passing as they are through an atmosphere of false representations, the scriptural definition of the true dignity of an ambassador of Christ. This remarkable composition is a copy, executed with exquisite fidelity, from the great original furnished in the writings of St. Paul. It would really seem, in truth, to have been penned by its framers with the inspired oracles lying open beneath their eyes, and bringing full before them, — in contrast with that portrait of the ministerial function with which they had been so long familiar, and which is even now drawn by multitudes around us in these present times, — the living picture, pencilled by the finger of God.

What, then, does this Office say? It declares, from first to last, that the ground upon which the ministering servant of God is to magnify his office, is simply this: that he is sent forth as a messenger of salvation, to those for whom the Redeemer died; to watch for their souls; to lead them, in their sin and misery, to the cross of Christ; to build them up in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; and, by the preaching of the word both in season and out of season, both in the temple and in every house, to prepare them for that kingdom which the blood of redemption has opened to all believers. Such, my brethren, is the teaching

of that portion of our Prayer Book, which is expressly devoted by the English Reformers to the description of the gospel ministry; and such, accordingly, are the views, which, in every treatise, in every narrative, in every manual of catechetical instruction, sent forth from our presses to the world, I trust we shall be found to promulgate.

Now, by the side of this sober and scriptural view furnished by our standards, let us place, for a few moments, that other theory, which, either in the form of express statement, or of implied recognition, is incorporated into a mass of publications, professing to represent our Church, which it is impossible to number. This theory, as it will be found upon examination, rests the exaltation of the Clergy upon certain powers and functions, unrecognized by the compilers of the Prayer Book in the language of our Ordination Office. That honor which comes from being a herald of redeeming love, and which, through the inevitable eclipsing of the messenger in the surpassing glory of his message, is naturally connected with humility, is, in this scheme of the ministry, either wholly left out of sight, or barely admitted to a very subordinate place in the account; while, in the room of this, it presents to us an order of men, glorying in their office on the ground of certain revived figments, which the artillery of Scripture, in the hands of our great Protestant leaders, had battered to destruction.

Let us look at one or two of the features of the clerical function, as thus urged, from various quarters, upon general reception.

The minister of God is represented *as gifted with the absolving power*. No longer standing forth, as in our liturgical offices he is seen to stand, simply to *publish* authoritatively the tidings of pardon to the penitent and believing heart, he is the channel through which this remission descends. He acts as the vicegerent of God. From him, as from the opener and the shutter of the door of grace, proceeds the talismanic sentence which conveys the boon ; and, until this priestly intervention has taken place, no seal has been affixed to the abounding promises of Scripture to faith in the blood of expiation. Now, what is there, in all this, of that delineation of the spiritual shepherd drawn on the pages of the Prayer Book ? What is there which is not fitted, in the very nature of things, to hide from him that Mediator whom he is especially commissioned to proclaim, and, setting up himself as another mediator, to plant him on a mysterious eminence not more destitute of warrant, than it is dangerous to his spiritual life ? Against this picture of an ambassador of heaven, our Church in its Ordinal has set up another. It was sketched by the hands of Paul : and tell us, if you can, where lies the resemblance between the two. “ And he gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers ; for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ ; till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

Christ's ministers are, again, by this same school of interpreters, regarded *as endued with a sacrificial character*.

Now it is very evident that this is nowhere maintained in our standards; which represent the ambassador of Christ as, first and chiefly, "a dispenser of the word of God," a commissioned herald to ruined men of the revealed plan of redemption: and, secondly, "a dispenser of the Sacraments," an administrator of the two positive institutions ordained by Christ: in one of them, receiving members, by the washing of water, into the Redeemer's visible body; and, in the other, delivering to the followers of Christ the symbols of bread and wine, in commemoration of the sacrifice offered upon the cross, once for all. In the absence, therefore, of any authority, either in the Ordination Office, or in other parts of the Prayer Book, for considering our Clergy as sacrificers before God, the argument derived from the mere name of "Priest," which is there applied to them, falls harmless to the ground. For, even without supposing, as some have done, and not without reason, that this word is only an abbreviation of the term "presbyter,"—and allowing to the title all the force which it is represented to possess,—it is manifest, from what has just been said, that it can be intended to claim priestly functions for the ministers of reconciliation only in a very subordinate and figurative signification. It may be easily admitted that they offer in the sanctuary, as leaders of the public devotions, the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving; or that, in the celebration of the Lord's Sup-

per, they conduct a feast of remembrance which, in the language of Hooker, hath “a proportionable correspondence to ancient sacrifices, although it hath properly now no sacrifice.” But more than this cannot be inferred from the use of the above appellation in our authorized standards. The framers of those standards have drawn them up in the fullest accordance with the whole spirit of the gospel. The priest under the Levitical economy offered sacrifices, in typical anticipation of the Redeemer’s expiation. When Christ at length came, he offered, as High Priest and victim, the one real and sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the world. Now, therefore, whenever the Communion banquet is spread, its mysteries, or symbols, instead of being themselves an offering, are plainly a prescribed and affecting memorial of that oblation which, once completed, can be made no more for ever.

And yet this is that office of presbyter, which, at various periods since the Reformation, and now again in our own day, we have seen transformed into a ministry totally alien from its nature. No longer depicted, as the Bible depicts him, as the preacher of Christ Crucified to them that are ready to perish, — as the pastor of the flock, giving to each his measure of meat in due season, — as the guide of the perplexed, the instructor of the ignorant, and the comforter of the weary, — the minister of Jesus now stands before us in another and a foreign aspect. His preeminence is not that blessed elevation which springs from the fact, that he is an envoy from God to proclaim his glory

in the person and work of Christ ; and that, through his labors, children are reclaimed from the world to pardon, happiness, and heaven. Nothing of this. He is the person, under whose touch, at the Communion feast, the elements become something, not indeed very precisely defined, but still something, to which all eyes are to be turned as the object of mysterious adoration ; something that virtually takes away from the material bread and wine their character as signs, and makes them in some sense that which is signified ; something whereby these substances themselves become the actual seat of that presence, which we had always hitherto been taught to regard as being in the hearts of Christ's penitent and believing people. And, in harmony with these views, the very titles of the clergy, grown familiar by common use, have been exchanged, here and there, for another more significant of their imputed powers ; the clerical testimonials of emigrants to our shores are couched in similar phraseology ; and the Protestant publisher of salvation to a world lying in its blood is attempted to be blended, in the associations of the people, with the sacerdotal functionaries of a corrupt and idolatrous Communion.

Among the subjects of just sorrow to every Christian heart in these present times, and in this our land, not the least prominent is the well nigh universal decay of reverence for office and for station. Our Catechism, when, in its own felicitous language, it is numbering up the details of duty to our neighbor, speaks of the honor due to our "governors, teachers,

and spiritual pastors." But we have no sooner read the summary, than the question comes painfully to the heart, Where is this dutiful spirit to be found? Long shall we wait for a reply to the interrogation. The scholars rule the masters: the children control the parents: and as for the shepherd of Christ's fold, that filial veneration and love with which, in better days, he was wont to be cheered and sustained amidst his trials, has almost become extinct. Here, then, the inquiry presents itself as one of unspeakable moment, — How is this ancient spirit of respect and confidence to be revived, and a state of things restored, in which, without the servile submission characteristic of a period of popular ignorance, mankind may once more yield to the ministry of the word their heart's affections? Now to this question there may, possibly, be various answers: but in one point it would seem that we must all agree, — that, among the means of bringing about this blessed change in the sentiments of men, the very last is to raise up alive again, from that grave into which the Reformation cast them, these claims of an unscriptural and extravagant power in behalf of those who are set "over them in the Lord." A priesthood, holding in their hands the keys of absolution, and, by the act of consecration, converting the symbols of the Supper into a fresh oblation of the body and blood of the Lord, will never seat themselves in the attachment of those to whom their mission comes. The attempt will nowhere be successful; and least of all will it prosper, in this region where Providence has made *our* lines to fall.

If such views of the ministerial office be those which the New Testament and our Church have sanctioned, let them be maintained, come what may. But, not being supported by most certain warrant either of the Bible, or of our written standards, we may be allowed to mourn over their dissemination, as turning away from us human sympathies, and bespeaking in advance the ridicule of mankind as our voluntary portion. Rejoicing, therefore, as we must, in the existence of a divinely commissioned ministry, and devoutly desiring, as we likewise must, to see it exerting its just influence upon our day and generation, against such distortions of the Prayer Book's teaching let us maintain a steady resistance. And equally against them it is the object, and will be the sacred privilege, of this Society, "earnestly to contend."

It would be impracticable, within the limits of this occasion, to view the subject before us in all its bearings. I shall only turn your attention, in conclusion, to that temperate view which our Church takes of *the efficacy of the Sacrament of Baptism*.

And here I shall not take advantage of that interpretation of our baptismal Office, by which it is represented as asserting nothing more, in the Thanksgiving after baptism for the regenerate condition of the child, than that he has been outwardly born again into a new and Christian estate. If this explanation can be admitted without doing violence to the language, it of course at once settles the question ; and effectually defends our Prayer Book from the charge of giving countenance to the monstrous supposition, that this

ordinance is, in every instance of its administration, the commencement of spiritual life.

But I shall admit, to the fullest extent, that these words of thanksgiving in the baptismal Service mean what, on the face of them, they appear to mean ; namely, an expression of gratitude for the fact, that, on the administration of water by Christ's command, the inward and spiritual blessing is communicated from on high. That our Reformers intended, however, by this language to imply, that the outward sign is invariably accompanied by that work of grace which it signifies, is effectually disproved by other statements in the Prayer Book, which, before deciding upon so momentous a question, every man is bound to examine.

It is contradicted, in the most express terms, by our Catechism, in that portion of its instructions which treats of this very ordinance. A question is there asked, highly pertinent to the point in dispute, respecting those dispositions, on the part of the recipient of this rite, which are necessary to its due reception. The reply to this interrogatory declares the necessity of the two scriptural preliminaries to the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, then, come in the exceptions to qualify the rule. In the Baptismal Office, they who are brought to the ordinance are declared to be the receivers of the promised grace: in the Catechism, those who have exercised neither real penitence, nor living belief, are pronounced to be excluded from the blessing. Thus viewed in

the light of fair comparison, that general proposition, upon which the sacramental Christianity of the present day so confidently rears its pretensions, stands forth in its true character. It means to assert, what none will question, that the Creator, on his part, is uniformly ready to give: but not denying meanwhile, that the creature, on his side, may not be ready to receive.

This supposition of the inseparable connexion between the outward sign, and the inward grace, being the doctrine of our Church, is still further refuted by that very Twenty-seventh Article, which relates exclusively to the subject of baptism; and which expressly limits the blessings of the Spirit, in this ordinance, to "those who receive it rightly." Here again, therefore, we perceive the same careful qualification of the general admission contained in the Baptismal Office. That Office directs that, in every instance without exception, after the rite has been administered the offering of praise shall ascend to God, for that operation of grace upon the soul of which baptism is the seal and pledge. But, in order to explain this broad declaration, the Article before us steps in with the mention of that condition, upon which the gift of the Spirit is suspended. In other words, that promise of God which, so far as he is concerned, is as boundless as the world, may, through the unbelief of the human party to this covenant, be utterly annulled.

By thus comparing our standards with themselves, the inference to which we are brought is as clear as the light of noon-day: that the Thanksgiving in our

baptismal Service, if declaratory of grace imparted, is simply *hypothetical* in its character. Being made for all, it can obviously pronounce no discriminating judgment upon particular and individual instances. It assumes that to be done, on the part of the receiver of the ordinance, which is required to be done: leaving it to that omniscient Being, who alone searches the heart, to fulfil his promises of grace where the terms of the gospel have been obeyed; and, where these conditional demands have not been met, to deny on his part the concomitant and conditional blessing. This portion of our Prayer Book thus stands out, confest of all, as consistent with the truth of God; and as but an echo of those very Scriptures of His, which, only on the assumption that “we are his people,” promise that “he will be our God.”

Now, in contrast with this sober, scriptural view, which our Church takes of baptism, — and in virtue of which it is to be regarded as an ordinance of perpetual obligation, as a means of signal grace and blessing, but, at the same time, as a rite connected with spiritual effects only in the case of the faithful receiver, — stands that extravagant scheme which, in these later years, has been again forced upon our notice with unmeasured zeal and activity. It is a scheme which attributes to baptism an efficacy, unsupported alike by Scripture, and by the standards of our faith: which represents the incorporation into the Church, by the washing of water, as identical with incorporation with Christ: and which, however it may be explained by its defenders, leads baptized persons

to rest in the external observance; and to forego, as needless, all earnest labors after the possession of that converted and spiritual mind, which is "life and peace."

The manifold results of evil which, in the event of the extensive prevalence of such a system among us, would be seen in the Church of our affections, in the decay of all that constitutes the vitality of religion, and in the substitution of a formal mechanism in its stead, I need not labor to shew. They have often occurred to your own minds, and any observations of mine could add nothing to their magnitude and solemnity. There is one aspect of the subject, however, in which it is, perhaps, most seldom considered, and on which I may be permitted, therefore, for a few moments to dwell.

It will be admitted that, in regard to the obligation and the benefits of the sacraments of Christ's appointment, there is a tendency, generally manifested throughout this country, and more fully developed in some portions of it than in others, to a spirit of low appreciation, and of consequent neglect. Vast numbers of our population seem disposed to strike out, in distinction from the scriptural path to the kingdom, roads of their own devising. While Holy Writ has enjoined these positive ordinances, there is a rebellious inclination to cast off their yoke. The false assumption every where lifts up its front, that "belief with the heart unto righteousness," and "confession with the mouth unto salvation," may be divorced the one from the other; and that, in face of all that inspiration has

said, man may live and die in a state of covenant relationship with God, while rejecting those two established institutions which are the seals of his covenant, and the prescribed symbols of a Christian profession. Now, in view of this wide-spread unbelief, it seems appropriate to ask what is the corrective to be applied? How shall this recreant spirit be brought into subjection to the Master's authority, and be made to feel that what God has joined together, no man may put asunder? Is it by urging, from the pulpit and from the printing-press, this theory of an inseparable connexion between the form and the substance? Is it by setting up against one error another and antagonistic delusion, as fatal as the first? In order to convince a man that there is no full obedience without the washing of water, are we to tell him that the washing of water includes the whole of obedience? Rather let it be engraved upon our hearts, that to this very extreme of neglecting the ordinance of God, mankind will be the more impetuously driven by such a scheme; and that, in the attempt to exalt even divine appointments above their just level, they will become degraded, by an inevitable reaction, to an equal distance below. Between these opposite manifestations, therefore, of contempt and superstition, our reformed Church spreads its middle way. And in exhibiting this way, it will be the glorious privilege of this Society to labor. It will be ours to put forth, in connexion with the subject of the baptismal ordinance, the abounding and impartial promises of God on the one side, and the requisitions for their enjoyment on

the other ; and to represent our Communion as saying, what the Scriptures to which she appeals say, — that “ baptism doth now save us : not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.”

My beloved brethren : — Such, as I humbly conceive, are the temperate views which our Church has taught us ; and in the imitation of which, as a Society professing fairly to exhibit her principles, I trust we shall pursue our work of diffusing heavenly knowledge. And, before closing these observations, let me with humility suggest, that our best method for the subversion of error will be the simple manifestation of truth. So far as it is possible, let the publications we send forth to the world be divested of that form of controversy, which, however needed at times, is never unattended by great accompanying evils. Let us, moreover, pray, that, being an association of Christian men for a large and beneficent object, we may be delivered from the petty spirit of party. Let it be our elevated aim to glorify Christ, and to turn many to righteousness. And we may rest assured, that, with a right purpose, conducted in the right temper, “ the Lord of hosts will be with us, the God of Jacob will be our refuge.”

